—Intensification of environment management to be made by the Mathura Refinery.

—Natural gas to be made available for industries.

—Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) to be made available for vehicles.

—Clean fuel to be arranged for Mathura Refinery.

—Hydrocracking technology to be set up for the Mathura Refinery.

—Identification of alternative strategies for environmental management in consultation with Asian Development Bank.

Shifting of Taj Mahal

5444. SYED SIBTEY RAZI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to certain reports proposing shifting of the Taj from Agra to a safer site;

(b) whether such a move has been suggested by the experts of the Ministry to save the Taj from environmental pollution;

(c) whether Government have taken any decision on these suggestions;

(d) if so, the details thereof, with estimated expenditure involved in it; and

(e) if not, the action proposed to be taken against those responsible for publication of such reports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) Yes, Sir, next item. "Taj to be shifted" was published on 1st April, 1995 in the Hindustan Times.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) and (d) Do not arise.

(e) This matter has been brought to the attention of the concerned authorities for appropriate action.

Extinction of rhinoceros

5445. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there are lets than 2,000 onehonned rhinoceroses left in India at present and their number is dwindling rapidly;

(b) whether the threat of extrinction of rhinoceroses is due to increased poaching, combined with habital destruction:

(c) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(d) what steps, if any have been taken by Government to curb this twin menace to the rhinoceros and other endangered species?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) The population of rhinoceros in the country is estimated at 1495. It is not true that their number is dwindling repidly.

(b) Although the rhinoceros is an endangered species it is not threatened with extinction as there are several populations distributed in 3 States and there has been significant decline in poaching cases in recent years. There are also no reports of habitat destruction as the rhino habitat is protected in the form of national parks and sanctuaries.

(d) The steps taken by the Government for protecting Rhinoceros and other endangered species are given below:

(i) A network of 6 wildlife sanctuaries and 3 national parks has been set up for conservation of the species and its habitat. Financial assistance is provided by the Central Government for development of national parks and sanctuaries, on request from the State Governments. A special scheme of Conservation of Rhinos in Assam has now been transferred to the State Go-

vernment alongwith resources since 1992-93 as per the recommendations of the National Development Council;

(ii) Rhino is placed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 thus getting the highest level of protection;

(iii) Trading in Rhino parts and products is also banned by law;

(iv) Cooperation of police, BSF, DRI and Army is also taken, as and when required, in apprehending the poachers and illegal traders;

(v) India is a party to the Convention on International Trade in Endan' gered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and abides by the regulations of international trade in endangered specie of animals and articles. Under the provisions of the convention Rhino is covered under Appendix I of CITES which bans international trade in the species, products and derivatives.

(vi) With a view to providing alternative home for Rhinos and also to rehabilitating them in their erstwhile habitat, schemes for 'Rehabilitation of Rhinos' has been started in Dudhwa National Park and Katerniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary of Uttar Pradesh.

(vii) Special schemes for protection and conservation of tigers, elephants and rhinos and their habitats are being implemented.

(viii) Raids are carried out by the Wildlife authorities whenever information of illegal trading in wild animals reaches them.

(ix) Regional and sub-regional offices on wildlife preservation are set up mostly at the main export centres of the country to prevent smuggling of wildlife products.

(x) There is a scheme for payment of reward to the informers, which among other things, helps in getting intelligence regarding smuggling of wildlife products.

(xi) A Committee set up by this Ministry to look into the issues related to illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products has recommended specific measures to deal with this problem which has been referred to the State Government for their comments and necessary action.

Distribution of Pattas to farmers in Gujarat

5446. SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have given permission to distribute pattas for the farmers who had occupied forest land in Gujarat;

(b) if so, how many hectares would be turned into agricultural land; and

(c) what are the conditions on which this sanction has been given?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) to (c) Two proposals had been received under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 from the State Government of Gujarat for regularisation of encroachments taken place over 10,900.47 ha. and 39,750.59 ha. of forest land in various districts of Gujarat, Formal approval for the proposal involving regularisaton of encroachment over 10,900.47 ha. of forest land has been accorded by the Ministry on 10.11.94. This proposal of the State Government has been approved subject to certain conditions which *inter alia* include demarcation of forest area to be regularised in favour of individual encroachers and raising of compensatory afforestation in a phased manner by the State Government. In respect of the other proposal involving 39,750.59 ha. of forest land, approval in principle has been accorded on 17-10-94.